

Anime Focus

58 SOUND BITES

Japanese voice-actor **Akira Kamiya** shares his thoughts on what it's like to sound off as ***Fist of the North Star***'s Kenshiro. Wa-TAHH!

THE SOUND AND THE FURY

PART ONE



A look into the history of one of Japan's most prolific voice-actors, Akira Kamiya—veteran of diverse roles from *Fist of the North Star*'s Nietzschean warrior Kenshiro and *Yūsha (Hero) Raideen*'s two-fisted hero Akira to *Urusei Yatsura*'s rich-boy Mendo and *Maison Ikkoku*'s sparkle-toothed play-boy Coach Mitaka. In the first of a two-part article, Kamiya gives a close-up look at what it's like to be a voice-actor in Japan, and explains how the robot classic *Getta Robo* paved the way for the action shows of today. From his panel appearance at Anime Expo '97.

“When you're first starting out, what you see in the script is something like, 'Boy A,' 'Boy B' or 'Boy C'...I was 'Boy C,'" Akira Kamiya laughs, remembering back to the very beginning of his now legendary career. "No name, maybe one or two lines. Any other work I got was what we call *gaya*, or 'walla,' basically the background voices in animation." A pretty humble start, especially for the man who would, almost single-handedly, eventually define the sound of the Japanese action hero from his role in *Getta Robo*, put voices to Rumiko Takahashi characters Shutaro Mendo and Shun Mitaka, and create the unforgettable signature sound of Kenshiro, martial arts master of pressure-points from *Hokuto no Ken* (*Fist of the North Star*).

"Back then, voice-acting was basically a little moonlighting actors did in order to make money," Kamiya says. "There was no actual career as *seiyū* (voice-actor) like nowadays—it was just an aspect of acting. Originally, I'd wanted to be a stage actor, so I joined an acting troupe. There, I met many, many now-famous voice-actors. For example, Lupin the Third's voice, Yasuo Yamada; Detective Zenigata's voice, Goro Naya...Heidi was there, of *Alps no Shōjo Heidi* ("Heidi of the Alps")—Kazuko Sumiyama—of course, Kazuko Sumiyama did a lot of magical girls back then—plus the girl who played Akko in *Himitsu no Akko-chan* ("Secret Akko-chan"), one of the original magical girls shows. Mako from *Mahō no Mako-Chan* ("Magical Mako"), the Magical Girl Sally, which is one of the more famous of all the magical girls—she was also there. All the magical girls and many other famous voice-actors were there. So, even though I'd joined to act on stage, there was this rail leading to 'voice-acting,' and I got on that rail...and this is where I ended up. That would be my roots as to 'how I became a voice-actor.'"

After doing bit characters and walla voices for a couple of years, Kamiya got a tip about an audition for the lead in *Babel II*, the animated show based on the manga by Mitsuteru Yokoyama, best known these days as the creator of *Tetsujin 28*, or as it's known in the U.S., *Gigantor*. "I made it to the finals of the audition for *Babel II*," Kamiya says. "There was just me and Masako Nozawa, whom you know from the voices of Goku and his heirs in *Dragon Ball*—at that time, all the young boy voices were done by women, so it was like, 'Ah, maybe we'll give a guy a chance...'" Kamiya laughs. "...So they gave

it to me. That would be my first lead role. From there I got the lead in *Kôya no Shônen Isamu* ("Isamu, Young Boy of the Plains"), and a third lead role was Shin Fubuki in *Zero Tester*—but by that time, I was actually being *requested* for that character from the production company. *Getta Robo* also requested me—that would be my fourth lead role—I played the character Ryo. So, basically, my career really began when I started to win in auditions, then to the point where they just began to request me.

"At the time of *Getta Robo*, I was called the 'Kamiya the Screamer,'" Kamiya continues. "The reason is, when you're acting, and your character takes damage, and you have to sort of *react* to it. Actors who were more guttural than I were just sort of doing it however, but since I was just a beginner, I really didn't know how to control myself, so I just let myself loose...and girls *really* liked it. I don't know why!

"Oh boy, I screamed a *lot* back then," Kamiya remembers. "Not only did I yell out loud when I was taking damage, I also yelled a lot when I was *causing* damage—and at the time, the pattern was that you *call out whatever your attack is*, and then yell. For example:

GETTA BEEEEEEEEEEAM!!!” Akira screams to demonstrate. “Usually, in a real fight, you can’t stop to go ‘Right Punch!’...by the time you started calling out what your attack was, the fight’d be over. But as for the acting part, it was a good time.

“At the time, of course, I didn’t really know *how* to say these words. I asked the producer about it,” Kamiya recalls. “For example, for a beam attack: in Japanese, the word ‘beam’ would go down at the end. When speaking normally, ‘*GET-TA BEam!*’ would be the proper Japanese pronunciation...but that almost feels like the beam’s gonna fall to the ground! So what am I supposed to do to make sure the beam gets there? I thought, okay then, I’ll flatten the sound out—*BEEEEEEEEEEAM!!!*—and that’ll make *sure* the beam gets there. That’s *one* thing I learned.

“There was also a *boomerang* attack. So *then* I had to make a sound like you’re *throwing* something....

“I did two years of *Getta Robo*. At the first season, I was in a unit called ‘Getta One.’

In the second season it was 'Getta Dragon.' In the second season, my character had this attack called the 'Getta Tomahawk,' and of course, before he would throw it, he would announce what it is: 'Getta Tomahawk!' It's not like you have to *show* the enemy what you're going to use, or *tell* them what it is. So, when they would actually throw it, I would do it as I said before, '*GETTA TOMAHAWK! TOMAHAWK!*' and make the sound of a whirling tomahawk in the air.

"*Mazinger Z* was on the air then, too, and there weren't a whole lot of other robot anime shows at the time. So I think we pretty much used up *most* of the calling-out attacks. I think anyone who did a robot show after that had a real hard time. No matter what they would do, it would be, 'Oh! That's just a copy of so-and-so's attack.' I felt really bad for them. And the funny thing is, kids who watched that and then grew up are doing the *same kind of work now* that I used to do back then. There was a show that just ended called *Chôsha Raideen* ("Raideen the Superbeing"),

and in the original show it was based on, *Yûsha Raideen* (“Hero Raideen” or “Raideen the Brave”), was a character I’d voiced—the main character, Akira. Most of the cast that had played the characters in the new *Raideen* show had watched *Raideen* as they grew up, and I heard that they all used *my* voice as a reference for how they should act. I think that actually made me pretty happy.”

Shouting heroes aside, one of Kamiya’s best-

known roles would have to be the grim martial artist Kenshiro of *Fist of the North Star*.

“Kenshiro was a character I wanted to play for a long time,” Kamiya confesses, but explains that the character’s deep voice was something he’d had to work up to. “Thinking way back, the second leading role I ever got was the ‘young man of the plains,’ Isamu,” Kamiya elaborates. “The setting was the mountains of the Sierra Nevada—it was like a Western, and there was this one really cool character called ‘Big Stone’ that showed up. I think the actor playing him was Kiyoshi Kobayashi, the voice actor of Jigen from *Lupin III*. I was acting in a voice like this...” —Kamiya demonstrates a very young, excited voice— “...and Mr. Kobayashi had this very cool, stoic, low voice for his character. At the time, well...that was my voice, and I didn’t have many low voices. Then, fifteen years later...I ran into Kenshiro. And finally, I had found a low voice for myself, and that’s what I used.”

He then goes on to explain Kenshiro’s trademark high-pitched battle cries as being modeled on Bruce Lee’s signature yells. “The martial arts exertions I did in a falsetto voice,” he admits. “At the beginning, I had no idea how to do that. When I first saw the actual characters on the page, it said ‘A-ta,’ or ‘A-ta-ta,’ he laughs. How it would normally be done, an exertion—A-TA!!! A-TA-TA!!—

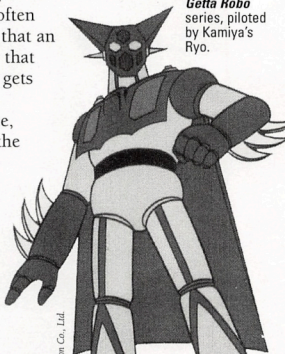
everybody knows that. But when you run A-ta-ta-ta together, it sounds real funny.” Kamiya solemnly demonstrates this technique in a deep voice, which garners laughs from the assembled audience. “So I talked to the original creator,” Kamiya continues, “Mr. Tetsuo Hara, and he said the image he’d had in mind is modeled after Bruce Lee. Bruce Lee has a rather thin voice, but very *high*. Almost like a cat. Meee-eeeowwrrr! So I took that, and made a *stronger*-sounding arrangement to that type of sound, and then sort of made it an exertion-type of sound effect. For example: WAAA—TAA! A-TOO!, in comparison to Bruce Lee’s A-too-oo-oo! A-ta-a-ta-a-oo-oo-oo! I didn’t really think a Bruce Lee voice on Kenshiro would work, so I made little changes.

“Thinking back on it, Kenshiro’s a weird character. When he speaks, he speaks in a very low voice, but when he’s doing martial arts, his voice is *very high*. But if we had sort of matched the martial-arts voice to the low voice, it would have sounded really weird. It would have been kind of comical, in fact. So, what we ended up with is sort of combining them together—[*High-pitched*] “YAA-TAA!” and [*Deep voice*] ‘I’ve struck one of your 700 acupuncture points. You are already dead,’” Kamiya laughs.

“A few years back, there was a Hollywood movie made of that version of that story, and then we did a Japanese dub of that. The main female character, Yuria, was a Japanese actor to begin with, and she dubbed over her own voice for the Japanese version, but for all the *other* characters, the producers brought together all the original *animation* voices for the movie dub.

“To put it frankly, the American actors’ martial arts exertions weren’t very good,” Kamiya chuckles. “The ‘One Hundred Strike Punch’ of the Hollywood actor...MMM-MMM-MMM-MMM!—that’s what he did. And then I did YA-TA-TA-TA-TA-TA!!!, and I thought to myself, ‘What if the lip-flaps don’t match?’” He laughs. “I thought the director *might* get really mad about that...but then, I thought, ‘how often does it happen that an animated show that I’ve worked on gets made into an American movie, and then I get the chance to dub it *back* into Japanese?’ That doesn’t happen very often, so it was a *very* fun experience for me.”

From the **Getta Robo** series, piloted by Kamiya’s Ryo.



AKIRA KAMIYA SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY, A-L

Adventure in the Otaku Galaxy: Indora
All Purpose Cultural Cat-Girl Nuku-Nuku:

Kyusaku Natsume

Babel II: Babel II

City Hunter: Ryo Saeba

Cutey Honey Flash: Dr. Kisaragi

Dangaioh: Roll Kulan

Danguard A: Takuma Ichimonji

Dog Soldier: John Kyosuke Hiba

Dokaben: Satonaka

Dragon Ball Z (movie 1): Garlic Jr

Elf 17: Mascot Tyler

Fandora: Kue

Fighter Warrior Daimos: Kazuya Ryuzaki

Fist of the North Star: Kenshiro

Gaiking: Sanshiro Tsuwabuki

Getta Robo: Ryo

Go Lion: Prince Sinclair

Great Detective Conan: Kogoro Mori

Hi no Tori (Space Chapter): Makimura

Isamu, Young Boy of the Plains: Isamu

Kinnikuman: Kinnikuman

Legend of Crystania: "Castaway King"

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